



**State of Connecticut**  
**SENATOR DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.**  
*Twenty-ninth District*  
**President Pro Tempore**

**Testimony**

**SB 621, AAC A Reduction in Smoking Rates**

**Public Health Committee**

**March 12, 2008**

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and Members of the Committee:

While we have made significant strides in recent years in reducing the rates of smoking and the burden of smoking-related diseases, there is still more to be done. 17% of adults in Connecticut smoke, which is just three points below the nationwide average. Furthermore, Connecticut was recently singled out by The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids for spending the least money of any state on anti-tobacco efforts.

**SB 621, AAC A Reduction in Smoking Rates**, would take an important step towards reducing smoking rates by fully funding the state's Quitline program, which is an essential part of the state's anti-tobacco efforts. Quitline currently provides callers with counseling and information about how to quit smoking. However, quitting smoking is an extraordinarily difficult endeavor; we are all well-aware of the tremendously addictive effects of nicotine. Sometimes individuals need more assistance than counseling to help them quit this dangerous habit.

The bill before you today would provide that additional assistance by funding nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) through the Quitline program. The success of NRT has been demonstrated in our state. The Connecticut legislature gave the Department of Public Health over \$1 million to add nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) to Quitline; this initiative was launched in July 2007. The program was so successful that the available funds were used up within one month and Quitline was forced to stop offering NRT. Clearly, there is tremendous demand and need for NRT that is not being met by existing programs. This is something we can, and should, do.

As part of my commitment to smoking cessation programs, I also support efforts to include NRT within Connecticut's Medicaid coverage. The federal government pays half

the costs of Medicaid; if we are able to leverage federal funds to pay some of the costs of NRT, then I believe it makes fiscal sense to do so.

The state will receive approximately \$143 million from the tobacco Master Settlement this year. Fully funding the Quitline program would be a valuable use of these funds, and would be an important step forward for Connecticut's anti-tobacco efforts. Most importantly, it would help provide needed assistance to those who want to quit smoking.

Thank you very much.